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BOOK REVIEW

Preston Dennett: *Out-of-body Exploring: A Beginner's Approach*

Reviewed by Matthew Fike, PhD

Preston Dennett's (2004) *Out-of-Body Exploring: A Beginner's Approach* falls squarely within the genre of spiritual autobiography, due mostly to the transformation that his mother's death and subsequent events effected in his world view. In 1984, at the age of 19, Dennett saw his mother's ghost, which not only shattered his belief that there was "no such thing as life after death" (p. xiii) but also sparked a desire to have out-of-body experiences and to study the paranormal in general. The resulting OBEs—over one thousand of them from 1986 to 2004—are the subject of this book. Thirteen chapters deal with a fairly standard array of topics: the "desire body," various experiments on the astral plane, astral people and animals, astral food and sex, mantra experiences, OBEs and healing, God and the Higher Self, high-level experiences, OBEs and psi, how to have OBEs, and various questions and answers. The organization is roughly chronological and ranges from basic to advanced as well as from short OBEs to longer and more profound ones. Frequent block quotations from the author's journal convey the experiences and create a sense of immediacy because they are often longer than the commentary that links them.

Dennett had the good sense to ask early on, "Do we really need another book about out-of-body experiences?" (pp. xiv-xv). It is a fair question, especially given his heavy reliance on well-known authorities such as R. A. Monroe (1977); B. Moen (1997, 1998, 1999, 2001); R. Bruce (1999); R. Peterson (1997, 2001); and others. The answer is yes, for two reasons. First, Dennett noted that "several of the experiences I've had have not been reported by other explorers" (p. xiv). Which of his experiences these are, however, is unclear because he modestly avoids highlighting them as such. Second, he seeks to transform the world by inspiring others to have OBEs. While the book has so far not resulted in mass spiritual evolution (a point borrowed from R. Bruce [1999]), its forthright presentation of Dennett's experiences as well as its simple, clear discussion of methods may well motivate some readers to give OBEs a try.

Out-of-Body Exploring commingles the difficulty of achieving the out-of-body state with important insights and ingenious solutions. As for the difficulty, it took Dennett a year just to get out of his body three or four times per month; and regarding an OBE that he had in 1997 (over a decade after starting his attempts), he wrote, "For the first time, I was getting some real control" (p. 142). In other words, more than 10 years were required just to move beyond the novice level. The developmental process was so arduous and his initial experiences so short in duration (often a minute or less) primarily because lucidity and emotional control were hard to

achieve. Dennett distilled the solutions down into a single piece of advice: “The keys are relaxation, awareness, visualization, memory, desire, and intention” (p. 170). By “awareness” he means lucidity, and many of the experiences in *Out-of-Body Exploring* begin with lucid dreaming. In discussing this matter, however, Dennett seemed to contradict himself. He stated, on the one hand, that “when we dream, we are really out of our bodies on the astral plane” (p. 45) and that “many dreams are actually half remembered OBEs” (p. 163). He claimed, on the other, that “lucid dreams and OBEs are closely related, but definitely different phenomena” (p. 45). When these statements are considered together, Dennett’s lack of precision is obvious.

Despite such fuzziness, lucid dreaming is the book’s most important key to achieving the out-of-body state. There is occasional mention of the relaxation process that leads to conscious separation; but since we all have OBEs every night, it is easier to become lucid and then to remember the experience (a point that may reflect an unacknowledged debt to S. J. Muldoon and H. Carrington’s [1969] *The Projection of the Astral Body*). Dennett mentioned various things that can facilitate lucidity. He cited in two places P. Garfield’s (1979) idea that one can transform a lucid dream into an OBE by going through a barrier, and he noted that “nearly every dream provides cues to [help us] become lucid” (p. 18). These include not only flying and levitation but also bizarre or anachronistic details sent by the Higher Self (for example, the presence of celebrities) to wake us up in our dreams.

Another shortcoming is Dennett’s lack of consistency in claiming that it is the desire body that projects itself out of the body. Many of his experiences do suggest that he is right, and the book is full of brutally honest recollections of his gluttony and lechery. “I’m lucid. I create a grocery store and go crazy. I eat potato chips and guzzle soda. I create a woman and have wild sex with her” (p. 105). He even admitted “a few inadvertent experiences during which my desire body took control and I invaded the privacy of women’s showers” (p. 171). Dennett’s desire body may sometimes run amok on one plane or another, yet he also mentioned R. Bruce’s (1999) assertion that the astral body is a *mental* projection, as well as his term *projected double*, which was defined as “the energetic vehicle (or subtle body) housing a functioning, energetic copy of a projector’s mind and memories outside the projector’s physical body during any type of OBE” (Bruce, 1999, p. 542). Another statement by Dennett seemed closer to the whole truth: “Each time there’s a shift, it’s because we are changing energy bodies. I was vibrating high enough to enter a high dimension, but at some point, I fell back into the lower vibration and into a lower energy body” (p. 131). A variety of bodies thus participate in an OBE. The higher the dimension, the fewer energy bodies we take with us; and, as we descend, those bodies come back together, which explains the false awakenings that Dennett mentioned a few pages later. Such an explanation would have strengthened the book’s theoretical framework. As the omission indicates, Dennett leaves a good bit of the heavy lifting up to the reader.

Quibbles aside, one has to respect the author's determination and admire his achievements, which he summed up early in the book:

By going out of body, I was able to fly to distant locations, [and for example] visit the moon. I was able to take a tour of the heavenly realms and many different dimensions. I met with deceased loved ones, I rescued lost souls and I bathed in The Light. I explored my past lives, encountered my Higher Self, met my spirit guides, studies in the Akashic Library and traveled into the past and the future (p. xiv).

Dennett's OBEs generate in turn such psychic experiences as precognition, waking visions, gestalts, lucidity while awake, and a sense that waking and dreaming are beginning to merge or reverse. Toward the end of the book, he even claimed that dreams are the real world and physical reality the dream. As a result, his perception of the physical world underwent a change that "would take another book to fully explore" (p. 156).

As we read, we note that *Out-of-Body Exploring* is a text about the reading of texts. Dennett read the authorities whom he frequently quoted to support his reading of his own experiences, some of which, strangely enough, involved trying to read astral texts (books, television, radio). In one case that will resonate with TMI readers, however, he missed an important opportunity to read an experience in connection with *Journeys Out of the Body* (Monroe, 1977), though he obviously knows it well. In chapter 8, Monroe reported being unable to penetrate a solid wall, which seemed to block the return to his physical body: "I rammed into a solid wall of some impenetrable material," which "was hard and solid, and seemed to be made of huge plates of steel overlapping slightly and welded together" (p. 117). Panicked, he desperately prayed for assistance, which evidently came in the form of a counter-intuitive insight; by reversing direction and flying away from the barrier, he soon reentered his body. Dennett described what is clearly the same obstacle: "I hit a massive barrier. This is the veil between the dimensions. It feels like a solid wall stretching forever in all directions" (p. 153). If the barrier really does separate the dimensions, it may partly account for things that Dennett did mention: our nightly amnesia, our ignorance of our past and future lives, and people's doubt of life after death. The barrier may also explain why Dennett's thousand-plus OBEs required "a combination of intense willpower, desire, focus, and intent. Only by obsessing myself with the subject was I able to generate out-of-body events" (p. 8).

Given that enormous difficulty, it is probably true that there is "very little evidence of any actual danger" (p. 170). But because "very little" is not "none at all," it is worth mentioning, for example, Robert Perala's (1998) account in *The Divine Blueprint: Roadmap for the New Millennium* of his friend Devon who died because she had stayed out of body too long. "So Devon's obsession with the inner realms finally cost her her place in the outer realm, a heavy price indeed," wrote Perala (p. 76). The disintegration of Devon's silver cord directly contradicts Dennett's assertion that one cannot get "locked out" (p. 170). In any case, one

rightly supposes that Hemi-Sync® reduces the difficulty and increases the safety of astral travel. Yet, despite the author's reverence for the works of R. Monroe and B. Moen, there is no mention of the sound technology or The Monroe Institute.

Curious, I e-mailed Dennett about these omissions: "Do I understand correctly that you accomplished your OBEs without the assistance of hemispheric synchronization? And if that is the case, do you, in retrospect, believe that your journey might have been easier if HS had supported your efforts to go OB?" (personal communication, February 17, 2011). He replied:

You are correct, I did not use hemi-sync [sic]. Much later, I did order a hemi-sync tape from TMI. I'm not sure if it would have been easier with it or not, but I would guess that, yes it would. When I finally tried it, I was surprised how the resonating sounds felt very much like the vibratory state that one feels immediately prior to a projection experience. The hemi-sync might have helped [me] get to that state more quickly. (personal communication, February 19, 2011)

He went on to state that he is working on another OBE book that "will reveal further adventures!" In a way, the fact that Dennett did not use Hemi-Sync makes the book more authentically what it sets out to be—an account of one man's dogged struggle to explore beyond the physical and the great success he eventually achieved. Because Dennett did it the hard way, *Out-of-Body Exploring* is all the more worth reading. Though subtitled *A Beginner's Approach*, it offers a model for developing one's own abilities to the expert level, and its frankness about the difficulty of consciousness on the astral plane provides a helpful reality check for those who are not psychic prodigies.

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